

## Lima Beach; Landscapes of an urban seacoast

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### Open landscape

At the end of the colonial period, the aristocracy of Lima changed the habit of cold river bathing (in the city in the water of the Rimac) to bathing in the sea<sup>(1)</sup> (Smith, 1839). This process of change was encouraged by the recommendations of medical treatments coming from Europe and by the first works produced by Peruvian doctors, such as Hipólito Unanúe<sup>(2)</sup> (Unanúe, 1805). One of so many rearrangements of habits in the new creole aristocracy, linked to an illustrated feeling, more interested in what was in practice in England France and Germany than in the national directives that would end up being discarded after national independence in 1821<sup>(3)</sup> (Del Águila 2003). Sea bathing is one of the practices that characterised the new ruling classes of Lima and the rest of America “liberated” from Spain.

Set on the left bank of the Rimac, Lima was thirteen kilometres west of its main port, Callao. Thirteen kilometres south was the fishermen’s village, San Pedro de los Chorrillos, located by a promontory of rocks and earth called Morro Solar. The village was on the upper part of the gorge, at one end of the wide bay of Miraflores. It was the port where the forces of the Liberation Army disembarked (the port of Callao was under Royalist rule).

The aristocratic families of Lima who moved to the village in the first summers of the republican era acquired, in time, the habit of renting the fishermen’s dwellings or “ranchos” for the whole season. Moving to Chorrillos by cart from Lima took a whole day. The caravan also carried the furniture that would be used in the primitive seasonal houses.

Thus, Chorrillos becomes a small leisure town: sea bathing in the morning; napping, hammock and reading in the afternoons; dancing in the evenings, music and betting games by night. According to travel chronicles written by Europeans who visited Peru during the republic, it is a rustic reflection of the western habits<sup>(4)</sup> (von Tschudi, 1854).

Robert Proctor, British, visited Chorrillos in 1924 and confirmed that the habits in these primitive summer resorts of the Pacific replicated the European practices of the 19th century. One of his travel stories is called: “Chorrillos, the Brighton of Lima”.

The chronicles also revealed how rough and precarious the resort was. The same Proctor doubted the good judgment and taste of the people of Lima choosing Chorrillos for sea bathing<sup>(5)</sup> (Proctor, 1835). Some ten years later, Flora Tristán was incapable of understanding the relationship of the people of Lima with this arid and unpleasant coast.

“I have said that I could not conceive the predilection of the people of Lima for Chorrillos. That word means sewer. It has been called so because of the water jets that fall from the top of the rocks surrounding the beach, which form a freshwater lagoon in the lower part. It is in that small lake where they go bathing.

In that place, the sea is very calm and the waves never reach the lake. The nearness of freshwater offers a great advantage to bathers, most of who go and wash themselves when they come out of the sea, so as to remove the salt particles adhered to their skin. The place is very uncomfortable to bathe in. With a little investment it could be made as nice as the bathing places in Dieppe. If Chorrillos continues to be fashionable, perhaps the Lima people will think about this one day<sup>(6)</sup>”.

As we can see, the characteristics of the natural scenario in which Chorrillos is located, explain the habits emerging in the resort. The Morro Solar is the geographical factor determining the climatic conditions. With 281 meters in height, it confronts the coastal winds of the south east, as well as detours the fog that occasionally covers Lima. The morro diminishes the force of the waves and allows the accumulation of sand on the coast. The rest of Miraflores bay is affected by wind; it is constantly cloudy and most of it lacks sand due to the strong surge.

In Chorrillos there was a more subtle factor (already mentioned by F. Tristán) that allowed the birth of the resort: the freshwater jets. The agricultural production of the Rimac valley required watering wide areas through canals, most of them of prehispanic origin, which took the river water to the cliff plateaus. These infiltrations were the emergence of the phreatic aquifer on the edge of the cliff.

The German painter J. M. Rugendas, well known for his representations of American landscapes, drew and portrayed this scenery during his travels in Perú. In “Los baños de Chorrillos” (1848) (“Baths Chorrillos”), Rugendas condensed all the

elements that structured the emergence of summer resort practices on the coast of Lima. The shaded cliffs show that it is a morning scene. On the upper part of the gorge can be appreciated the silhouettes of some dwellings. A steep dirt road leads the bathers on mules and horses. The Lima aristocrats appear dressed in elegant city clothes that they change for bathing suits in the primitive “covachas” (“cabins”). These structures, set on terraces built of stones on the beach, were served by the villagers of Chorrillos, Negroes and Indians who helped the ladies get into the sea.

All the groups that formed the social structure of Peru were represented on the shore. The area of the baths is next to an artisan fishermen’s cove, so that the scene is shared by elegant people in bathing suits and a number of lightly dressed Indians and negroes. The scene shows a beach landscape, without the therapeutic atmosphere; they are baths for leisure and recreation.

#### **Landscape in transition**

During the 19th Century, Chorrillos continued developing itself as the preferred summer resort of the Republican ruling class. The construction of the train in 1858 allowed its connection with Lima thus consolidating its condition, until its total destruction and plunder by Chilean troops during the War of the Pacific in 1881.

Then, the interurban electric tram allowed Lima’s reconnection with its three main resorts: Miraflores, Barranco y Chorrillos. The tram shortened travel times and allowed more groups of the Lima society to have access to the coast, thus consolidating the southern resorts as “small towns” of temporary stay. Public

and private agents began to invest capital in a series of important civil works, important for the construction of a resort landscape: piers, walks, parks and new bathing spaces.

The building of piers and walks on the cliff tops allowed for a scenic relationship with the coastal view. The natural gorges and the “informal descents” communicated the city with the small pebble beaches at the foot of the cliffs. The coastal border began to be inhabited by a set of constructions on steel pilots, like docks, that entered the sea providing wooden surfaces and shade.

Towards 1930, the increased number of electric tram routes and the growing number of automobiles allowed the expansion of the urban orbit of Lima towards Miraflores, Barranco and Chorrillos. The resorts suddenly grew and they joined the city under a singular suburban typology of resort-neighbourhoods. At that time, the provisional coastal constructions disappear and the first concrete summer resort buildings appear.

The Baños de Miraflores (1934-1935), by architect Héctor Velarde, is an important example of a new architecture by the sea. It was a building parallel to the coast, horizontal and symmetric, sitting on stilts on a small pebbled beach. The restaurant and the events hall were in a double height central space; the dressing rooms, in two lateral wings. The architecture was determined by what in Lima is known as the “boat style”, a reinterpretation of the naval forms, a reference that the building enhanced by very small steel ladders that indicated the entry points to the sea.

Towards 1940, the people of Miraflores in Lima grew with the habit of daily bathing in the sea in the summer months. Writer Julio Ramón Ribeyro<sup>(7)</sup> recalls this new suburban Lima in his short stories, revealing a city linked to the coastal border.

#### **Reclaimed landscape**

Lima was practically the same size for 400 years. From 1940 on, a strong migration from the countryside to the city marks the first great impulse of urban growth, a process intensified in the seventies and surpassing all planning capacity. Today, the population exceeds 8.5 million, in an urban area of 840 km<sup>2</sup>.

Lima is a relatively new city; 83% of the urbanised area is not more than 40 years old. In the geographic centre of this urban conglomerate is Miraflores bay, nowadays known as “Costa Verde” (“Green Coast”).

The summer resorts of Chorrillos, Barranco and Miraflores were suburbs in the metropolitan Lima, becoming neighbourhoods of a city that reached the coast. The capital extended itself over agricultural plantations isolating the ground and blocking irrigation and, therefore, the famous “chorrillos” (water jets). The cliffs lack vegetation and have become dumps and the terminal of the sewage system. In the process of construction of this large city, thousands of tons of landfill made it possible to reclaim land from the sea, a stretch that, in the sixties, became a free-way at the foot of the cliff, burying the old structures of the baths that survived practically abandoned in the polluted water.

Nowadays, the Costa Verde stretches along 20 kilometres of seafront, of which only ten per cent is used as a bathing beach. The main resort is the “Agua Dulce” (“Freshwater”) beach, located

in the Chorrillos district, next to the Fishermen's village.

Agua Dulce beach stretches as a series of programmatic strips<sup>(8)</sup>. This system begins at the top of the cliff, at the end of the public transport routes. On the upper part there is a walk or pier, under remodelling at the moment, which allows for long walks along the coast. It has a complete view of the bay and of the outline of the cliffs, from the Morro Solar to the Point. The outline of San Lorenzo Island can be seen from the pier as well.

The height of the cliffs, their fragile constitution and the motorway at its bottom, form a hazardous region for any pedestrian intending to reach the sea. Only one flight of steps, followed by a pedestrian bridge, approaches the upper rim of the cliffs to the beginning of the beach.

Under this bridge is the main "improvement" work of the public places on the coast of Chorrillos. It is a garden area of approximately 12 hectares, resulting from a road node of the motorway system. This kind of park has a series of monumental elements inside: two gigantic sculptures of couples in gestures of affection, a large lagoon of sinuous border equipped with lights and water games, a set of large letters with the name of the district, "Chorrillos" (a clear reference to the Hollywood sign), and two cascade-type water fountains).

The huge budget allocated to the implementation of this part is only comparable to the expenditure on maintenance and operation required by the district. In summer, municipal guards chase out the groups that try to get into the pool to wash themselves after having been to the beach. At the same time, on the lawn,

some people have lunch, others take a nap and families have their photos taken at all the attractions.

After crossing the motorway, the visitor reaches a set of constructions that accommodate the beach services. Dressing rooms, public baths, restaurants and sport fields. Despite having a big municipal sign saying "closed down", these restaurants work behind closed doors and prepare hundreds of menus which are served under the parasols (in the given circumstances, they are in the delivery business). Towards the north, there is a stretch of 250 meters of pier with a sinuous design, some palm trees and iron and wood benches. This is a short walk, with a few merchants and temporary fairs, which separates the motorway from a parking area.

From this service line, the pier and the parking area, starts a strip of land that in summer serves as a place for massive shows, music concerts or launching of publicity campaigns. The end of this sector is marked by 34 wooden boxes painted blue. These boxes, half buried into the sand, are the shops where key pieces to transform urban visitors into bathers are kept and can be rented: beach umbrellas, deck chairs, Morey<sup>(9)</sup> body boards, balls and bathing suits.

The stretch of sand is defined by these blue boxes and the shore. The region is sectioned in quadrangular areas managed by the merchants of each storage. Each box identifies its sector by the colour of the beach umbrellas it lets, forming shady spaces that may be 200 meters wide a peak times. On their long stays until sunset, bathers share the space on deck chairs or towels, with

pots, dishes and inflatable sea water swimming pools for the children.

On the beach, numerous vendors circulate announcing their offers. Some funny carts, pushed by their owners, move slowly and clumsily along the shore; photographers, carrying a portable scenery, a two by two meter background with landscapes printed on plastic cloth; a conifer forest, a waterfall, a steam liner, the jungle, a valley with cliffs, Chinese boats and Machu Picchu. In front of them, a series of objects complement the scene: plush cats, plastic palm trees, artificial flowers, inflatable dolls, etc. Travelling photographers carrying their study, selling instant pictures to remember dreamed vacations, the cheapest alternative of a fantastic tourism.

The fluctuating tide of bathers is observed at a distance from the rented boats starting from the fishermen's dock. A cheap round trip which also offers the possibility to "disembark" and swim back to Agua Dulce beach.


#### **Expectant landscape**

A public summer resort is constructed by the sea in Lima year after year. A powerful activation that transforms the scenery of the beach by building leisure structures with subtle elements. The resort and the shore form a very rich landscape, capable of interlocking not only immediate leisure and recreation needs. Citizens transformed into bathers change their behaviour in public beach space. Wearing light clothes, they share, in a few square meters, the intimacy and the hedonic pleasure of the public scene. A crowd in bathing suits promenades along the coast among itinerant scenarios that allow for an instant

transport to fantasy destinations.

*Fantasies like republican Lima that constructed in Chorrillos, at the beginning of the 19th Century, a scenario to consolidate the new ruling elite. The rough coastal landscape was deeply modified by architectures that materialised new relationships between society and nature and new disciplines for the body. Structures and buildings for a singular functional relationship between individuals and the sea. A city that in its process of growth included the resort into its assets.*

*The metropolitan council has announced an ambitious plan to restructure Costa Verde: optimization of the motorway system and construction of numerous paths down to the beach and walkways to connect the city with the coast. As from March, an army of lorries with thousands of tons of landfill material will retrace the coastline. The plan sets the public space as the main theme of the intervention and projects a pier of 15 kilometres, with cycleways, jogging tracks and pedestrian walks. Undoubtedly, a contemporary intervention of an urban park and not necessarily a summer resort for the city.*

*Obsessed by "green areas," Lima does not seem to interpret with full intensity and richness the expression of public urban space shown by its beach. There are empty sites in the list of programmes of the new coast: areas for sunbathing, walks on the edge of the breakwater, blue boxes for services, strips of beach umbrellas, pier walks, dressing rooms, restaurants, lawns where to sleep in the afternoon and freshwater pools to wash the salt away. The vibrant landscape, on the shores, awaits an architecture that interprets and designs a new form of the public space. *

#### NOTES

(1) *"The healthy practice of bathing in the sea was in former times confined chiefly to those affected by skin diseases; but within the last forty or fifty years, as we are told, sea-bathing has been preferred to river-bathing, or to the cold baths of the old Alameda, and fountain of Piedra-lisa."*

(2) *"Sea water if preferable to river water, as it is more detergent; so, a poet says that sea water cleans all the dirt of the human body."*

(3) In *Las pieles y los velos (Skins and veils)*, Alicia del Águila (2003), shows the repression process that affected social habits in urban Lima at the beginning of the republican period. It is possible to consider that the social structure and conduct that was developed in Chorrillos are an idle and libertine contraposition. A society that behaved in a disciplined way in the city scenario while it went to the beach in a mood of dissipation.

(4) *"The routine of the day's occupations and amusements is much the same as in most of the watering-places of Europe, excepting that, in the latter, the hammock is suspended by the chair in the reading-room and coffee-house, or the bench on the promenade."*

(5) *"It cannot be said that the inhabitants of Lima showed much judgment and taste in the selection of their bathing place, for it is situated on a sandy, barren promontory, and when the wind is strong, the houses are filled with dust, and it is on your shoes when you are outside"*

(6) *"The inhabitants of Lima have chosen to bathe in the sea at the most arid and unpleasant place on the coast, according to my taste. The place is called Chorrillos. The Izcue family had rented a summer house in Chorrillos and they invited me to spend there as much time as I wished..."*

(7) As a child, Julio Ramón Ribeyro moves to live in Miraflores. In his work there are numerous passages linking urban life to the resort neighbourhoods. The sea baths and the gorge appear portrayed as bordering places and linked to the complex codes of the social structure of Lima in the middle of the 20th Century. (Ribeyro, 1994).

(8) *Lecturas Urbanas (Urban Readings)* is a recent publication seeking to create a record of contemporary Lima. Each issue focuses on an urban fragment, collecting representation projects such as cartographies, descriptions, interviews and photographs. The second issue of the collection is dedicated to Agua Dulce beach (Llona y Nakamura, 2010).

(9) Editor's note: Tabla Morey is a synthetic foam body board. It is an accidental invention of surfer Tom Morey (when his surf board split and he returned to the shore riding one of the pieces).

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

See page 35

## Landscape, photography and architecture Demonstrations in modern Chilean architecture

Horacio Torrent

*Chile, landscape and architecture Since when?*

*It has become frequent for some time to consider landscape as a key element in local architectural production. In the most specialized architectural critic, as well as in the most general and qualified divulgence, landscape seems to be a commonplace to explain certain contents of the generation of the architectural form establishing relationships with place and geography.*

*Certainly, with over a decade of argumentation in this sense, the critic has also influenced production, fostering a feedback cycle in which the term "landscape" is recurrently associated to the explanation of ideas and tools with which architecture is thought and produced. The influence of the acknowledgement and display of the country's varied geography on this cycle, as well as on other practices and disciplines, from poetry to popular art, from tourism to country image, is not minor.*

*Conceptions around landscape are already an institutionalized part of Chilean architectural textual and formal*